

# presstime

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

## FOR THE RECORD

■ To remember military veterans all year long, the Kearney (Neb.) Hub's Info-Hub audiotex system, (308) 234-4636, offers an ongoing series of recordings from World War II and Vietnam War veterans describing their experiences in battle.

■ The Portland (Maine) Press Herald has revamped its business Internet site, <http://business.maintoday.com>, to include a Maine Stock Index, tracking locally important companies, and the Press Releaser, a message board where small businesses can post information.

■ The New Castle (Ind.) Courier Times took tables and statistics from NAA's "Why Newspapers?" brochure and featured them in a full-page ad promoting the newspaper to advertisers. Customers responded enthusiastically to the data.

## Readers Carry the Torch

Stretch slim reporting funds

**G**ive those readers gold medals! That refrain still echoes throughout Australia's Shepparton (Victoria) News building, where editors redefined "reader involvement" during the Sydney Olympics. Other small papers with a distant event to cover may take heart from the News' experience.

Rather than use its meager \$2,000 (\$1,000 American) Olympics budget to hire a free-lance journalist, the morning News (circulation 10,479) recruited readers attending the Games to serve as reporters. Costs amounted to establishing a toll-free phone line and providing T-shirts to participants. By the Games' end, 80 readers had written stories on the competition, atmosphere, celebrity encounters, even the quality of the hot dogs.



Published articles included writers' photographs, snapped at a pre-Olympics orientation. Recruits e-mailed or dictated stories, producing four-to-eight pages of daily "Share the Experience" stories. Photos came from wire services and, in some cases, the volunteer scribes.

"It was fantastic fun...and gave us all a lift here in the newsroom," says Editor Jo Breen. "We knew they would not have the skills of trained reporters, but to be honest, sometimes that was the charm of the articles."

"It was unique, and many readers said they couldn't wait to see what was going to be in the next day's paper. Some of our 'reporters' became celebrities back here in Shepparton."

Exclaimed Breen, harking to Aussie swimming phenom Ian Thorpe, "Would we do it again? In a flash! In fact, we would be off the blocks quicker than the Thorpedo!"

Contact Breen by e-mail, [jobreen@sheppnews.com.au](mailto:jobreen@sheppnews.com.au).

—Hillel Kuttler

*The author is a Baltimore free-lance writer.*

## Nourishing Internet Appetites

"I'll have a B.L.T., fries and a newspaper.com."

That order might be heard in the cafeteria of the Herald & Review in Decatur, Ill. (morning, circulation 34,066), ever since two personal computers were installed there. The paper's managers decided to recycle the old Macintoshes for employees' personal use, especially those who, like press operators or maintenance workers, don't use personal computers on the job. Since October, anyone on a coffee break, lunch hour or otherwise off work has had an open invitation and the opportunity to surf the Internet or send e-mails from the cafeteria.

The company wanted "to encourage our employees to be more familiar with our Web site and the Internet in general [and] to become more comfortable with technology," says Herald & Review Technical Services Manager Andy Whitney. "We encourage people to check their

e-mails and do Christmas shopping [online] because we know that the more savvy our employees are, the better it is for us."

The move required minimal investment. The retail-ad department was planning to junk the computers, Whitney explains, and Internet access comes via a corporate wide-area network connection.

"I see a lot of people using them at lunch hour," he adds. "I have had people say, 'It's nice to have access to e-mail because I don't have access at work.'"

The paper also extends interest-free loans to any employee wishing to purchase a home computer. About 15 have taken advantage of the offer in each of the past four years, a "fairly significant" response, Whitney says. For more information, contact him at (217) 429-5151.

—Hillel Kuttler